

However, I was spared all trouble in the matter. From the railway-station Madame de Mérinville (I am generous enough to call her by that name still) despatched a note to Madame Berthier, stating that sudden and urgent business had summoned her to Paris, and that she had availed herself of her friend M. Fondricourt's kind offer to be her escort on the journey. There was some smiling at Madame Berthier's when the contents of this note became known. It was thought generally that Madame de Mérinville had certainly eloped with M. Fondricourt.

The same night I related the truth to the professor. I really could not keep it any longer to myself. He was much interested.

"So Fondricourt was a mouchard, was he? Well, I am not surprised. No wonder he would not submit to a phrenological examination. He had a bad face; I have no doubt his development would have been worse, if possible. There was a low animal cunning in his looks; and he had the green eyes of a cat. But let him take care, or he will find madame a match for him, and something more. A very remarkable woman that! A most interesting and valuable case, phrenologically speaking. Secretiveness, acquisitiveness, very large; but I have seen like developments on previous occasions—chiefly in convict prisons, however. But destructiveness—it was splendid! enormous! magnificent! as big as my fist, hidden under all that beautiful, beautiful golden hair. Again, I say, let that mouchard take very good care of himself. I do not envy him his journey to Paris by the side of that charming lady."

He turned suddenly to me as he said:

"Do you understand destructiveness, young man? I think not; happily for you you do not possess that organ—indeed, your head is no great shakes, as you English say. But destructiveness means murder—that is the simple explanation. I repeat, let M. Leroux—miserable scoundrel that he is—let M. Leroux take heed of Madame de Mérinville!"

It was strange to read some two or three days afterwards in a Paris newspaper of a mysterious occurrence on the Great Northern Railway of France. The body of a man had been discovered in a first-class carriage. It was doubtful whether his death was to be attributed to suicide

or to murder. He had been found lying prone at the bottom of the carriage; a bullet from a saloon-pistol had pierced his brain. Death must have been instantaneous, said the doctors. The body had been identified by several witnesses. The dead man was proved to be Pierre Leroux, an industrious and ingenious agent of police. His pockets had not been rifled. It was thought that he had been travelling alone. The matter, said the newspaper writer, was involved in mystery—was altogether inexplicable.

There was no mention of Madame de Mérinville. Nor am I able to add another word concerning her. I have never seen or heard any more of her since she departed so suddenly from Madame Berthier's in charge of the man calling himself M. Fondricourt.

It was clear to me, however, that certain of Professor Wolff's observations upon the matter had not been so wholly absurd as I had in the first instance been disposed to believe them.

THE MYSTERY OF ORA.

BY ROSA MULHOLLAND.

THERE is something inexplicable in the story, but I tell it you exactly as it happened.

Born to the expectation of wealth, certain casualties of fortune swept away my possessions at a blow. I was young enough to relish the thought of work, and for three years worked unremittingly, till my health began to feel the strain, and I resolved to take an open-air holiday. A friend who was to have accompanied me changed his mind at the last moment, and I set out alone.

I chose to visit the wildest parts of the west coast of Ireland, and was rewarded by the sight of some of the finest scenes I had ever beheld. Keeping the Atlantic on my right, losing sight of it for a time, and again finding it when some heathery ascent was gained, I walked for two or three days among lonely mountains, accepting hospitality from the poor occupants of the cabins I occasionally met with. It was fine August weather. All day the hill-peaks lay round me in blue ether; every evening the sun dyed them first purple, then blood-red,

while the solitary slopes and vales became transfigured with a glory of colour quite indescribable. At night the solemn splendour that hung over this wilderness kept me awake, enchanted by the spells of a more mysterious moon than I had ever known elsewhere.

One morning I started to cross a ridge of mountain that separated me from the sea-shore, and was warned by the peasant whose breakfast of potatoes I had shared that I must travel a considerable distance before I could meet with shelter or food again.

"Ye'll see no roof till ye meet with the glass-house of ould Collum, the star-gazer," he said. "An' ye needn't call there, for he spakes to no one, an' allows no man to darken his door. Keep always away to yer left, an' ye'll get to the village of Gurteen by nightfall."

"Who is this Collum, who allows no man to darken his door?" I asked.

"Nobody rightly knows what he is by this time, sir; but he was wanst a dacent man, only his head was light with always lookin' up at the stars. He built himself this glass-house, for all the world like a lighthouse; an' so far so good, for it did the turn of a lighthouse on them Eriff rocks, that'll tear a ship in ribbons like the teeth of a shark. An' there he did be porin' into books an' pryiin' up at the heavens with his lamp burnin' at night; an' drawin' what he called horry-scopes, thinkin' he could tell a man's future an' know the saycrets of the Almighty. His wife was a nice poor thing, an' very good to travellers passing the way, an' his little girl was as gay and free as any other man's child; but somehow there's no good to be got of spyin' on the Creator; an' after his wife died he got queerer an' queerer, an' fairly shut himself up from his fellow-creatures; an' there he bes, an' there he remains. An' the daughter seems to have grown up as queer as himself, for she niver spakes to nobody, not these last three or four years, though she used to be so friendly."

"Well," I said, "I shall keep out of old Collum's way;" and I started for my long day's walk.

I had walked a good many hours, and had crossed the steep ridge that separated me from the sea-board; had lain and rested at full-length in the heather, and gazed in delight at the magnificent view of the Atlantic, with its fringe of white low-lying serrated rocks, interrupted here and there

by a group of black fortress-like cliffs, looking as though on their hither side they might have "casements opening on the foam of perilous seas" in these "faëry worlds forlorn." I had begun to descend the face of the mountain by a winding path when I became conscious of something moving at a little distance from me, and sheltering my eyes from the sun saw the figure of a woman against the strong light—a figure which came towards me with such a swift vehement movement that it seemed almost as if she had been shot from the blazing sky across my path. She put both her hands on my arm with a grasp of terror, and then stammering some incoherent words, extended one arm and pointed wildly to the sea—that serene ocean which a moment ago had looked to me like the very image of majestic peace, with its happy islets sparkling on its breast. What was there in that smiling, storm-forgetting ocean to excite the fear of any reasonable being? My first thought was that she was some poor maniac, whose all had gone down out there on some stormy night, and who had ever since haunted the scene of her shipwreck, calling for help. I could not see her features at first, so dark was she against the strong light that dazzled my eyes.

"What is the matter?" I asked. "What can I do for you?"

As I spoke I shifted my position so that I was in shade, while the light fell upon her; and then I saw that she was no madwoman, but a very beautiful girl, with a face full of strong character and vivid intelligence. The look in her eyes was the sane appeal of one human creature to another for protection; the white fear on her lips was a rational fear. The firm gracious lines of her young countenance suggested that no mere cowardly impulse had caused her to seize my arm with that agonised grasp.

As she stood gazing at me, with that transfixed look of terror and appeal, I saw how very beautiful she was, with the sunlight pouring round her and almost through her. Her glowing hair, which I had thought black, had flashed into the warmest auburn, and lay in sunny masses on her shoulders; her eyes, deep grey and heavily fringed, glowed from her pale face with a splendour I had never seen in eyes before. She was poorly and singularly dressed in a faded calico gown, and an old straw hat, tied down with a scarlet handkerchief; but even as she stood nothing could

be more perfect than the artistic beauty of colour and form which she presented to my astonished eyes. Almost unconsciously I noticed this, for all my mind was engaged with the expectation of what she had to tell me, with the awe of that look of living imploring anguish, and the wonder as to what that message could be which she seemed to be bringing me from the ocean.

As she did not speak I repeated my question: "What is the matter? Tell me, I beg, what I can do to help you?"

Her eyes slowly loosened their gaze from my face, her arm fell to her side, a slight shudder passed over her, and she turned away.

"Nothing." She almost whispered the word, and moved a step from me.

"That is nonsense," I said, placing myself in her path. "Pardon me; but you are in some trouble—in some danger, and you thought I could save you from it, or, at least, help you. Let me try. Let me know how I can serve you."

"I cannot tell you," she murmured, and then raised her eyes again to mine with another wild look full of unutterable meaning. Behind her gaze there seemed to lie a lonely trouble, which peered out from its prison-house and asked for human sympathy, but was crossed and driven back by a cloud of unearthly fear. I thought so weird a look had never passed from one living creature to another.

I felt puzzled. So sure was I of the reality of her forlorn anguish that I could not think of passing on and leaving her to be the victim of whatever calamity threatened her under the shadow of this lonely mountain. And I felt, by an instinct, that the womanly weakness within her was clinging to me for protection in spite of the steadfast denial of her words.

"I am a stranger," I said, "and you are afraid to trust me; but I give you my word I am an honourable man—I will not take advantage of anything you may tell me."

Her lips quivered, and she glanced at me wistfully. She looked so young—so piteous! I took her passive hand firmly in mine, and said again: "Trust me."

"I do, I could," she faltered; "but oh! it is not that. It must never be told. I dare not speak."

She turned slowly round, and her eyes

went fearfully out to the sea, wavered towards the cliffs, and lit on a glittering point among them; then she snatched her fingers from mine with a wail of terror, and, dropping on her knees before me, hid her face in her hands and wept.

I waited till her agony had spent itself, and then I raised her up gently and tried to reason with her. But it was all in vain. No confidence would pass her lips. She became every moment firmer, colder, more controlled. All her weakness seemed to have been washed away by her tears; and yet the calm despair on her soft face, bringing out its strongest lines of character, somehow touched me more than any complaint could have done.

"I thank you deeply," she said. "You would have helped me if you could. Go your way now, and I will go mine."

"I will at least bring you to your home," I said. "Where do you live?"

"There," she said, pointing to the glittering point on the rocks.

I shaded my eyes and looked keenly through the sunlight, and suddenly it flashed upon me that yon glitter came from "old Collum's glass-house," and that this was his daughter.

"Is your father's name Collum?" I asked.

A sudden change passed over her—I knew not what—like an electric thrill.

"That is his name."

"And he lives at yonder observatory?"

"It is our home," she replied after a pause.

"Let me accompany you," I said.

"No one comes there; he—he does not make anyone welcome. I beg you will not mind me; I am accustomed to roam about alone."

"I have walked a long way," I said, after a few moments' reflection, "and I am tired and hungry. I hope you will not forbid my throwing myself on your father's hospitality for a few hours. I cannot reach the nearest village before nightfall."

This clever appeal of mine had its effect. She no longer urged me to leave her, though a painful embarrassment hung upon her. Under other circumstances delicacy would have forced me to relieve her from this, but I had made up my mind to leave no means untried to help her. I had a strong suspicion that old Collum was cruel to his child, and that she feared to let a stranger witness his ill-

conduct. I determined to discover for myself, if I could, what sort of life he forced her to lead. We descended the mountain silently together, and, crossing a difficult passage of rocks, arrived at old Collum's house.

It was a curious old grey weather-beaten building, wedged into and sheltered by the cliffs, and looking as if in some early age it might have been carved out of their grim masses. The observatory was a much newer erection—a round tower with a glass chamber at the top, looking like a lighthouse to warn mariners from these dangerous rocks. The house was of two storeys—three rooms below and three above, and we ascended a narrow spiral stair to the higher chambers. My companion led the way to an apartment in the front—a dimly-lighted gloomy place, with two small windows set high in the wall, from which nothing could be seen but two square spaces of ocean. The interior of this room showed how very ancient the building must be, and it had, in fact, been built as a hermitage by monks in an early century. The stone walls, made without mortar, had never been plastered, and the rough dark edges of the stones had been polished and smoothed by time. Upon them hung a map of the world, one or two sea-charts, a compass, a great old-fashioned watch of foreign workmanship, ticking the time loudly, and a few pieces of ancient Irish armour and ornament dug out of a neighbouring bog. The floor was paved with stones, worn into hollows here and there, and skins of animals were strewn over it. The fire-place was a smoke-blackened alcove, and across it, sheltering its wide nakedness, the skin of a seal was hung, fixed in its place by an ancient skein, or knife, of curious workmanship. On the rude hearth-stone lay the red embers of a peat fire; and though an August sun was glowing in the heavens, yet fire did not seem out of place in the chill of this vault-like dwelling.

As we entered my companion cast a hurried glance into the room, and seemed relieved to find it unoccupied. She threw off her hat, and opening a cupboard began to prepare the table for the meal which I had begged of her. All her movements were graceful and lady-like, and her beauty seemed to take a new character as she made her simple housewifely arrangements. Excitement and exaltation were gone from her manner, wildness and brilliance from her looks. No longer

glorified by the sun-light, her hair had ceased to flash with gold, and had darkened to blackness in the shadows of the room. Her down-cast eyes expressed only a gentle care for my comfort, and, as I watched her with increasing interest, a faint colour came and went in her face.

I took up a curious old drinking-cup of gold which she had placed on the table. On it was engraved the word "Ora," and I asked her what it meant.

"It is my name," she said. "The cup was found not far from here, and my father put my name upon it."

Now when she said this there was wonder in my mind, not that she bore so strange and original a name, but because the words "my father" were pronounced in a tone of such mournful and compassionate lovingness as to startle away all my preconceived notions as to the reason of her unhappiness.

"Perhaps, if not wicked, he is mad," I thought, "and she is afraid of having him taken away from her."

As I pondered this thought with my eyes fixed on the door, it opened, and a sallow withered face appeared, set with two dull black eyes, which fastened in blank astonishment on my face. "Collum, the madman!" was my mental exclamation on beholding this vision; but as the door opened farther, and a figure was added to the face, I saw that the intruder was a woman.

Ora turned to her, and raising her hands, talked to her on her fingers; then, as the old creature began to make up the fire, said to me:

"She is deaf and dumb, but a faithful soul, and all the servant we have. She goes our messages, fetches our provisions, and does little things which I cannot do myself."

"A strange household," I reflected: "an aged madman, a deaf and dumb crone, and this beautiful, living, vigorous creature! Outside, the wilderness of mountain and ocean. What a place—what company for Ora on winter nights!"

I said aloud: "And you, and she, and your father, are really the only dwellers in this lonely spot?"

She glanced up quickly, and a shudder of agitation passed over her, such as I had seen before. She did not reply for a few seconds, and then she said in a low pained voice:

"There are only three of us."

A most distressing feeling came over

me—a conviction that the girl was answering me with a wary reserve, veiling her meaning so that, while she did not speak absolute untruth, she resolutely kept something hidden from me. Everything about her persuaded me that this was done against her will. Her eyes expressed a candid nature; her manner trusted me, except at moments when my words jarred on the secret chord of anguish. Some terrible dread made her treat me at such moments as an enemy.

I sat at table, and she waited upon me, serving me with an anxious care which made me feel ashamed of the pretence which had thrown me on her hospitality as a hungry man. I had little appetite, but, like Geraint, felt longing in me ever more “to stoop and kiss the tender little thumb that crossed the platter as she laid it down.” My meal over I felt that she would expect me to depart; and as I ate I pondered as to how I could contrive to remain in old Collum’s dwelling.

I was resolved not to go without making his acquaintance—yet how was I to force myself into the old man’s presence? Even as the thought passed through my mind my question was answered. The door opened, and the master of this strange domicile appeared.

My first thought was that I found him much younger, keener, more vigorous and wide-awake than I had expected. Despite his long white hair, beard, and eye-brows, I saw at once that he was not a very old man; even his manner of opening the door, and the step with which he entered the room, gave one the idea of physical strength in its prime. There was no droop of the dotard about his features or figure—no dreamy absent look of the stargazer in his fierce black eyes—no lines of abstracted thought upon his cunning brow. As he entered the room, not expecting to see me, I saw him just as he was—in all his reality; and I felt at once that had he known I was there he would have presented a different appearance. I seemed to know this by instinct, as one does sometimes divine certain things, by a sudden flash of intelligence, in the first moment of meeting with a fellow-creature.

As he stood in the doorway, looking at me with rage in his eyes, I saw his soul unveiled; the next moment—how or why I knew not—I beheld (my gaze having never been withdrawn from his face) a

different being. The tension of his figure had slackened; the lines of his face lengthened and weakened; the shaggy grey brows veiled the languid eyes; the forehead had assumed the look of the forehead of a visionary. He flung himself on a seat, and said feebly:

“Excuse me, sir; but I did not know that our poor dwelling was honoured by the presence of a guest. Ora, my dear, you ought to have told me.”

Ora was behind me, and so intent was I upon watching the strange being before me that I did not look to see how she had taken this address. Besides, something warned me that it would be better to notice her as little as possible in her father’s presence. Striving to overcome the extreme repugnance I felt to my host, I said:

“It is I who ought to apologise for my intrusion, but”—here it seemed to me that I felt the thrill that quivered through Ora standing behind me—“but finding myself a complete stranger in need of rest and food in this lonely region, I ventured to throw myself on your daughter’s hospitality. I am afraid, indeed, I forced myself upon her kindness.”

“You are welcome, sir,” he said; “welcome to all we have to give. We live out of the world, and have little to offer to those who are accustomed to better things.”

His civil speech seemed to clear difficulties from my path, only to put greater ones in my way. That this wily man had, as well as his daughter, a secret to guard, was an established fact in my mind. That cruelty to her was not the whole of it I felt sure. Whether his civility was a proof that he feared, or did not fear, detection by me, I could not at the moment decide, but put the question away for after consideration, along with another fact which I had noted without weighing what its value might be. The man spoke with a foreign accent, and with a manner which suggested that English was not familiar to him, and had been learnt late in life. He was of foreign workmanship, as surely as was the quaint old watch that ticked so loudly over the rugged fire-place.

As I talked to my host I studied the name on my drinking-cup more frequently than his countenance. Something warned me that he would not endure anything like scrutiny; at the same time, I felt that I was undergoing a searching examination

from the keen cruel eyes half hidden under their drooping eye-lids.

"You are an Englishman, I suppose?" he said.

"Yes."

"And have never been in this country before?"

"Never."

"And in all probability what you see of it in this holiday will be enough for you. You will hardly come back."

This was said with an affectation of carelessness which would have imposed upon me had suspicion not been aroused within me.

"Nothing is more unlikely than my return."

As I said this my conscience smote me, for I already felt that I could never more be entirely indifferent to the country which held Ora. The answer pleased him, however. There was a certain relief in his voice which I felt, and this encouraged me to make a bold stroke towards attaining my own purpose.

"I am going to make a request," I said, "which I hope you will not think impertinent. This bit of coast scenery is so beautiful that I feel a great longing to explore it further. I could not do so unless you will be so very good as to allow me to return here in the evening, and give me shelter for the night. I am well aware there is no dwelling in the direction I would take, and my health is not good enough for sleeping out of doors."

I prolonged my speech after my request was made to give him time to prepare his answer; and I forbore to raise my eyes to his so that he might have a moment to quench whatever light of ire my audacity might happen to call into them. There was a slight pause, which told me my precaution had not been an unnecessary one, but when I looked up his face was placid and bland.

"You are welcome," he said, "to what poor accommodation we can offer. Ora, let a room be prepared for this gentleman."

I thanked him, and took up my hat to go upon the excursion I had so newly designed. My host also rose and prepared to leave the room with me.

"The old owl must go back to his nest," he said, with an attempt at pleasantry. "I am a dabbler in astronomy, an observer of the stars, and my days pass in making calculations. My obser-

vatory is my home. When I entered the room some time ago I was irritated beyond measure by a problem, the solution of which still eludes me. A little society has soothed me, and I shall return to my labours refreshed."

This speech convinced me more than ever that he was an impostor. Not only had his words of information about himself a false ring in them, but his apology for his appearance in the moment when he had stood unveiled before me revealed a depth of consciousness which was betrayed by the effort to hide it. If anything had been wanting to complete the impression made by him upon me, it would have been supplied by the evil look which he turned upon Ora as he left the room. This look he, of course, intended to be unseen by me, and I was thankful my interception of it was unperceived. It was a significant look of warning, and contained a threat.

He went to his observatory, and I took my way over the jagged rocks along the sea-shore, thinking deeply over all I had seen and heard.

It seemed to me that I had to sum up a number of contradictory evidences. That old Collum was not the visionary nor the star-gazer which public report and his own representations declared him to be, was to me past doubting. That he had some heavy stake in this lower world, and was playing a part to win it, I believed, upon the strength of my own observations. Yet what object was to be gained by a life of such entire seclusion as his? The wildest ideas occurred to my imagination as to the possibilities of leading a criminal life in this wilderness; and were rejected almost as quickly as they took shape in my mind. His well-known inhospitality forbade the supposition that he could be a waylayer of travellers; and besides, had he been a murderer, Ora would not have stayed by him. She was free to roam where she pleased, and could as easily have escaped to the nearest town as she could have climbed the mountain upon which she had met me. It was more likely that he might be a forger, and an undertaker of secret journeys into the world and back again to his den. Could her knowledge of his evil life account for her conduct? I thought it might, and yet, having granted this, I still felt that there was a mystery behind which I could not unravel. One moment I felt convinced that Ora hated and feared him, and that it was from him she would

have appealed to me for protection; the next I remembered the accent of love with which she dwelt on the words "my father," uttering them in a tone that was crossed by neither shame nor terror. And another point remained in my thoughts, though I knew not what conclusion I could draw from it. The man was of a foreign nation. I believed that he was not a European. True, my informant might have overlooked this fact when giving me his slight sketch of the unloved recluse, but from his name I had concluded he was an Irishman. "Collum" I had supposed must be a namesake of St. Columb; but, of course, it might as easily be a corruption of some difficult Eastern word. From an Irish mother Ora might have inherited her wonderful grey eyes and tender bloom, together with a mind and heart as beautiful as her exquisite face.

The only result my cogitations produced was a feeling of satisfaction that I was going to pass one night at least under old Collum's roof. I acknowledged to myself that there seemed very little likelihood of my being thus enabled to make any discovery; but the vague hope, that during the next twenty-four hours I might find some faint clue to Ora's mystery, cheered me in spite of reasonable probability. I felt no pang of conscience at the thought of playing the spy upon my host. The one fact that remained clear on my mind regarding him was that he was a criminal who ought to be detected, whose existence blighted the life of the innocent girl who had the misfortune to be his child. And then my thoughts wandered from him and rested exclusively on Ora.

As I lay upon the rocks with my hands clasped behind my head, gazing out to sea, my eyes roamed over the numerous islands that lay scattered on its bosom for miles towards the horizon. Some looked large enough to support life, others were mere clusters of rocks; yonder one was gleaming like an emerald in the sun and seeming to invite the tired traveller to a sea-girt paradise, while over there another lowered, making a spot of sinister gloom on the smiling ocean. One that bore this latter character had a peculiar fascination for me. Its jagged rocks were like cruel teeth; it showed no cheerful fleck of green even when the sun touched it a moment and fled away. It seemed always in shadow, and had a fierce gloom in its aspect that

made one shiver. "All that enter here leave hope behind," I murmured, looking at it, and fancying it might well be the home of despairing spirits.

Birds were wheeling above it, and as I watched them, now black in the shadow and now white in the sun, I fell into a sort of dream—slumbering lightly, yet never losing the consciousness of where I was. I thought I heard the birds talking loudly to each other, and they talked of Ora.

"Pluck her out of yonder dungeon," said one, "and carry her far over the sea!"

"I cannot," said the other; "she is chained to the rock. Her father has chained her, and she will not tell."

I started out of this dream to find that the sun had set, and I resolved to return at once to the observatory. When I arrived the door of the house lay open, and I went in without seeing anyone, and ascended the winding stone stair which did not creak under the foot.

In the room where I had left her Ora was sitting alone. Outside it was still daylight, but in this gloomy chamber with its small high windows dusk had long set in, and a small lamp burned on the table, throwing a heavier darkness into the corners around. The young girl sat by the lamp, poring intently into a book. The lamp-light fell full on her face; and on that beautiful face was such a look of horror as it froze my blood to see. So absorbed was she that she did not perceive my approach, and I paused involuntarily, pained at seeing her suffering soul thus laid bare before me once more. Surprise deprived me for some moments of the power of speech. To find Ora a student was about the last thing I should have expected. To see her buried in a study which, from the expression of her face, I could not but fancy in some way connected with the woe of her life, was a still greater cause for amazement. Could she be conning some task which had been set her; or striving to forget in the pages of a book moments of terror which were only just past? But no; as she read, all her mind, all her being, were engaged with what the book conveyed to her; and as the moments passed, that fearful indescribable look grew and grew on her face, till at last she raised her eyes and fixed them on vacancy with a gaze which seemed to threaten madness.

I could not bear it any longer.

"Ora!" I cried, touching her shoulder,

"for Heaven's sake tell me what horrible thing you are looking at!"

She started violently, and let the book fall, put out her arm to bar my taking it up, and then sank back in her chair exhausted by conflicting feeling. As before I seemed to feel her passionate desire to confide in me—a desire struggling in the chains of her deadly fear. I gently put away her hand and took up the book.

"Let me look at it?" I said. "What harm can it do? You shall not tell me anything but what you please. The book can surely betray no secrets."

She bent her head, and I opened the book. It was old and worn, the cover worm-eaten, the pages yellow and brown with time. The type was so strange, that at first sight it seemed to be written in a foreign language; but as my eyes became accustomed to it I was able to read.

It was a book on necromancy, treating of the power of the Evil One, and of the mighty and terrible things he enabled these to do who leagued themselves with him and played into his hands. It was written with a certain force of imagination and diction, and, apparently, a thoroughness of faith in what it set forth, which was calculated to exercise an almost fiendish influence over a sensitive and delicate mind, and of which even the strongest and most sceptical reader must for a moment feel the spell. As I turned page after page, and gradually mastered the entire drift of the book, I asked myself could it be that all the terrors of the supernatural had been brought to bear upon Ora's imagination, and that the fears which bound her were of this extraordinary nature?

"You do not believe a word of all this terrible nonsense?" I said smiling, as I closed the uncanny volume, which seemed almost to smell of brimstone.

She gazed at me with a look of amazement, in which there was for a second a gleam of something like relief.

"Ah," she said, "you talk like that because you are ignorant. You are not so well educated as I am. See here!"

She drew back a curtain that covered some rows of rude book-shelves, all filled with volumes looking like fit companions of the book on the table.

"Look over these," said Ora, "and you will see that my instruction has not been neglected."

I did look through them, and found

them the most extraordinary assemblage of compositions that ever were brought together for the bewilderment of human creatures. There were several long treatises on astrology, dream-like mystical books full of fascination; then came angury, the knowledge of signs and omens; necromancy, witchcraft, and vividly detailed information regarding leagues with the person of Satan which powerfully underlay all the movements of the world.

"If these and these only have been your school-books," I reflected, "Heaven help you, poor Ora!"

I thought of a lonely childhood and youth passed in this wilderness of rock and ocean, of winters which were probably all one long howling storm, and asked myself how the poor girl had preserved her senses, fed upon such teaching as this.

"Are these books your father's?" I asked, hardly able to contain my indignation against the wretch who had so poisoned her mind.

"Some of them," she answered, with a quiver of the lip; "those on astrology."

"And who gave you the others?"

She trembled, cast at me the wild look she had given me on the mountain, and threw up her hands in a defensive attitude.

"Don't!" she said hoarsely. "Don't ask me questions. If I answer them I shall have to hate you for evermore."

She then turned quickly towards the wall, and leaning against it, hid her face between her hands.

The words, the movement, gave me a thrill of gladness.

"Ora," I said, "you must never hate me. Nay, listen to me. If you can love me instead, I will take you away out of this miserable life, with its secret dread of—Heaven only knows what! As my wife you shall have every happiness that a loving heart can procure for you. And I shall ask you no questions. If ever a moment comes when you feel that you can confide in me, dear, I shall trust that then you will speak."

I drew away her hands from her face, and she looked at me with a bewildered blush of surprise.

"You?" she stammered. "You would marry me?"

"Is that so very unreasonable?"

Her face became gradually glorified by a look of such radiant joy as showed me for an instant what happiness might make of her; but it quickly faded away: the joy went out like light in a gust of

wind, the blush was replaced by an ashen pallor.

"Oh, why has this come to me," she murmured with quivering lips, "only to be found impossible, only to deepen my misery?"

"Why impossible, Ora?"

"That I cannot tell you. If I were to tell you it would bring such ruin as you could not bear to hurl upon me."

Having said this her old reticent calm descended upon her like armour; she withdrew herself from me, went over to the table, and taking up the book she had been reading replaced it on the shelf with its companions, drawing the curtain across, as if to prevent any return to the discussion of the subject of her studies. Then she stood silently waiting as if expecting me to leave her.

"You had better go to your room," she said gently. "He—he will be displeased if he finds you here with me."

I obeyed her desire at once, fearing to bring down a tyrant's wrath upon that tender head.

The room assigned to me was small, but its window was well placed, being in the gable of the house, and thus commanding a noble view both of the inland, with its mountains, and the island-strewn sea. True, it was rather out of reach, and at an inconvenient height—so that an effort must be made if one wanted to enjoy the outer world through its medium. It would seem, indeed, as if the windows of this house had been planned with a view to shutting out the perpetual sight of the ocean which was so near. Had the builder foreseen that future dwellers within the walls might find the companionship of the great ocean monotonously intolerable? Whether or not, the blindness, so to speak, of the house, and the bold and peering inquisitiveness of the observatory close by, struck me as contrasting with each other curiously.

I extinguished my light and threw myself on the bed, but felt that I was not likely to sleep. My mind flew back over all the events of the day, and I could scarcely believe that I was the same person who had parted from his peasant-entertainer in the morning, saying: "I will take care to avoid old Collum's dwelling." I felt as if years must have elapsed since the time when I had never seen Ora, since the moment when I saw her darting to meet me upon the mountain, as if the sun had cast her upon my path. Since

I had beheld that light of love and joy in her face, I resolved that nothing would induce me to give up the hope of making her my wife—no impenetrable mystery should daunt me; no terror, natural or supernatural, should be allowed to wrench her away from me. At the same time, I must be careful not to persecute her. Ignorant as I was of the cause of her sorrow and fear I must be content to wait patiently; if necessary, to watch over her from a distance. Time, which unveils wonders, would be certain to unravel the mystery in which Ora was entangled.

As the night advanced I became more and more fevered with tantalising thoughts and vain speculations, and at last, just as the first faint indications of approaching dawn appeared, I left my bed, and with some difficulty established myself in such a position at the window as enabled me to have a view of all the landscape beauties below. I looked sheer down into a bed of rocks, which went like jagged steps to the sea; and beyond this foreground lay the ocean, with its islands dimly discernible in the misty daybreak. One by one the darkness gave up its hidden treasures, and allowed them to creep under the mysterious grey veil of the morning.

"The sun will come," I said to myself. "The sun will come; and presently how beautiful all this will be!"

I was trying to persuade myself that so would the clouds and mysteries of Ora's life dissolve away, when a slight sound immediately below startled me, a sound no greater than the flutter of a bird's wing, but sufficient in the intense stillness to make me look to see whence it proceeded. And I did look, and beheld a sight which surprised me: Ora gliding over the rocks like a spirit, stopping to look about anxiously as if afraid of being observed, and then hurrying on towards the sea. A shawl was round about her head and shoulders, and she carried a basket on her arm. She was clearly going a journey, and was making towards the verge of the cliffs. Was it possible her household duties could take her away to a distance at this extraordinary hour? And whither could she be going by water?

I lost sight of her for a few moments as she disappeared among the rocks, but soon a little boat shot out from beyond them, and Ora was in it, rowing away from the land with all her might.

Outward, still outward, I saw her darting like an impatient bird over the calm sea in the still grey dawn. The wildest thoughts came into my mind. Was she fleeing away frantically, trying to escape from all her troubles at once: from the mystery of her home, from my love and the discoveries it might impel me to make, from every difficulty that beset her? And whither? Had she any plan; or did she in her ignorance hope vaguely that she might reach by chance some goal of safety, touch with her little hunted feet some shore of peace, where, unknown and unquestioned, she might loosen the cords of misery by forgetting her own identity?

Suddenly my crazy thoughts were rebuked, and I saw that she had a simple and definite purpose in her voyage. She was making for one of the islands out yonder that were creeping one by one out of the shadows of the night. It was that particular islet of gloomy and fantastic shape and expression on which yesterday the sun had refused to shine, and over which the birds had talked and wheeled in my dream. She neared it, touched it; I saw her moor the boat, and vanish among the rocks of the island shore.

After an interval of half an hour she reappeared, and presently I saw her coming, small and scarcely visible as she and her skiff were in the distance, and looking, as she plied her oars, like some dark sea-bird on the wing. Landing where she had embarked, she returned along the rocks, with swift glances of alarm cast on all sides, and sped like a frightened dove into the shadows of the house.

I mused long over this secret expedition of Ora's. Her evident fear of being seen, and the fact that she bore with her a well-filled basket, which she carried carefully, bringing back the same basket empty, forbade me to suppose that she could have gone to fetch any simple produce of the island for household purposes. Whose observation had she feared? Not mine, for she never once glanced towards my window. Had she waited till her father had left his observatory, and might be supposed to be asleep, before she stole forth on her solitary adventure? And if not, what was the purpose of her visit to the island? I felt assured that some human creature's need had drawn her to the secret expedition; she was supplying sustenance to that creature unknown to and

in defiance of her father. I did not guess these facts; I divined them at once; and the knowledge gave an added pang to my mind.

Who was the person lingering in retreat upon that gloomy island? Why did he stay there? If it were a man who had thus secured the devotion of a woman like Ora, why did he not free himself and her? Why did he not step into her boat, and escape with her into the safety of the vastness of the world. I wearied myself with asking questions, with indulging my indignation against this cowardly protégé of Ora's, who was content to lie by and let her suffer, till my reasoning powers returned, and I remembered that I knew nothing of the facts of the case.

On leaving my tiny apartment I found breakfast ready for me in the sitting-room, and Ora waited upon as she had done the day before. She looked unnaturally pale, and there were dark circles round her eyes that told a tale of suffering. She was in her most impenetrable mood, and I scarcely ventured to speak to her. Whilst I was at breakfast old Collum came into the room, and though he kept up an appearance of civility in his manner towards me, yet I felt that my hour had come, and that I must go. He had bestowed his society upon me in order that he might see me out of the house. There, in his presence, I was obliged to say good-bye to Ora, and left the place accompanied by the man, who walked with me a mile along the shore.

I arrived at Gurteen in the evening, but found it impossible either to stay there or go farther away from old Collum's observatory. The knowledge of Ora's lonely trouble held me like a cord, and the thought of that gloomy island, with Ora's little boat speeding towards it, haunted me wherever I turned. The overwhelming desire to know more of the mystery I had left behind me so deprived me of the power of pursuing any other idea, so ignored all difficulties in the way of discovery, that I gave up battling with it, and resolved to spend the remaining time at my disposal in hovering near the spot which I had quitted in the morning. Having rested a few hours at the village inn, I set out again in the twilight to walk back again the way I had come, without having any positive purpose in so doing, and drawn only by the craving to see whether Ora's little boat would again be on the water in the still grey

hour that lies between the night and the dawn.

At a certain distance from Ora's home I found a cave in the rocks in which I could rest, with my eyes on that line across the sea from the house by the observatory to the gloomy island. A faint moonlight illuminated the track as I began my watch; but it soon vanished with its shadows, and in the pale obscurity that followed I saw the thing I had expected to see—Ora's small bark on its solitary voyage. She went and came as on the preceding night, and in the sunrise there came a vivid light across my mind. I remembered that when Ora met me on the mountain she had pointed towards the sea: she had indicated the very island which she now visited by night. I had felt that she was bringing me some message from the ocean, but afterwards I had forgotten this striking impression made by her gesture in the first moment of her appearance. Now the first and the last seemed to join and close the circle of my speculations: the beginning and end of Ora's mystery was centred in the island.

I passed the succeeding hours in making up my mind to a certain course, as a man does who finds he must steer between two inevitable dangers. I felt that I must run the risk of incurring Ora's hate—of overwhelming her with that ruin of which she had spoken. I must dare even that in the effort to save her. And yet what ruin could overtake her innocent youth? There was no shadow of guilt on her face, and I would never allow her to involve herself in the well-deserved ruin of others. With all this reasoning I came to my conclusion, and made my arrangements with a sense of the deepest pain. I was going to win Ora, or to lose her. At all events I would set her free.

Retracing my steps to the village, I hired a boat and set out to row myself to the mysterious island. Rowing through the red sunset on my strange quest, like a man in a dream, I touched the lonely shores of my desire; and mooring my boat in a creek on the seaward side of the isle, I slowly went my way to discover what it might support or contain. Nothing did I find but rocks and heather and a sprinkling of grass. There was no sign of any human habitation, no evidence of life except the occasional cries of the gulls and curlews. What brought Ora here, night after night, in the silent hours?

Did she come to feed the birds, or did some supernatural power compel her to a rendezvous with unquiet spirits? I smiled as this latter thought passed through my mind; but truly there was something witch-like in the shapes and expressions of the surrounding rocks as twilight came on—something uncanny and eerie in the sough of the breeze through the heather, and the lapping and murmuring of the great calm ocean that girdled me. All through the hours of the night I walked the island, listening, watching, straining every faculty in the intensity of my vigil; sometimes starting in pursuit of an imaginary figure, which seemed to climb the rocks on before me or to dart across the streaks of the moonlight, but always finding that fancy had taken advantage of some accidental form of an inanimate thing to deceive me.

At last the moon set, and that scared wakening look came over the sea which means the dawn; and the pale hours brought Ora. When I saw her coming my heart misgave me as to the wisdom of my adventure. I was going to spy on her, to hunt her down, to possess myself by stratagem of her secret. The fear of her hate unmanned me; but with a strong effort I thrust aside such weakness. I had come here, not to injure, but to save her.

She landed close to where I lay hidden. She moored her boat and climbed the cliffs, and I followed her. So safe from observation did she consider herself, that she never once thought of turning her head, and I kept near her easily till I saw her suddenly stoop, and apparently vanish into the rock.

Coming to the spot where she had disappeared, I found an opening in the stone, and, stooping as she had stooped, followed her down an irregular winding passage, which led to a subterranean cave. I had completely lost her, and groped my way in the dark; but after some minutes I heard the murmur of voices, and presently saw the glimmer of a light. Approaching this light, I came to an opening into a wider cave, on the floor of which a lamp burned, throwing a dreary light on two figures that clung together in the gloom of the subterranean solitude. One of them was Ora, who had flung herself on the neck of the man, who was evidently a prisoner in this natural dungeon.

A dizziness seized me, and for some moments made me forget myself and my

purpose in coming to the place. I stood as if stunned. I had no idea of listening; but across the cloud that had descended on my mind I heard the low tones of Ora's voice murmuring with infinite tenderness:

"Oh, father! oh, father! oh, poor, poor father!"

The soft words, with their despairing, caressing monotony, flowed into my ear and into my brain like a river of light. Her father was here. The other was an impostor. Foul work had been done. I thought no more of displeasing Ora, but stepped into the cave.

At sight of me Ora uttered a low cry of anguish that I can never forget, and wound her arms round the old man (who looked to me like an aged, etherealised likeness of the knave in the observatory), as if she would protect him from some deadly harm. The man's eyes were turned in the direction where I stood with a look of ghastly expectancy rather than fear, while Ora's were fixed on his face with that sort of gaze we turn on the dying when the parting soul is hovering upon their lips. So they remained, locked in each other's arms, waiting as if for a sword to pierce them.

"Ora," I said, "what does this mean? I am come to save, not to hurt you."

She answered not a word—she did not seem to hear me; but the old man spoke to me at last, slowly and awfully, as if from the verge of another world.

"Sir," he said, "you mean well; but, unknown to yourself, you have brought ruin to me. This is the hour of death."

His head sank on his breast, and again I endured a long silence, which seemed hardly broken by our breathing. I bore it as long as I could, and then I spoke again.

"Let me beg you to listen to me," I said. "There is no one on this island, save ourselves. I am a friend; I can help. Why do you associate me with death?"

With a long sigh the strange old man raised his head, and said:

"I know not why I am still here to answer you; but believe that I do not blame you. You are but the voice of fate. Yes, Ora; I read it long ago in the stars, and it was folly of me to think to escape my doom. Stranger, the blow that I expect will not fall from any human hand, but none the less will it fall. You are innocent of all purpose against my life, yet your discovery of me

here is the signal for my death. Suffer me to pass my last moments in peace with my child."

Hearing this speech, I made up my mind that the poor old man was mad; and resolving to humour him, I retreated to some distance, and gave no sign of my existence for a considerable time. After an interval which seemed to me an age, I at last spoke again.

"Pardon me," I said; "but you perceive that from some cause or other the event you expect has been delayed. Will you not make use of the time thus given you to think of your daughter? The doom you speak of does not include her."

"I have no fear for her. I have read her happy fate in the stars. Freed from me, the last of her troubles will be over. Friend, I feel a desire to tell you my story. If time be granted to me, I will do it."

I hailed the words with joy, and prepared to listen.

"I am an astrologer. For long years I lived among the stars, and they revealed to me secrets not known to men who walk the earth looking downward. I knew early that misfortune would cloud the latter days of my life; but the nature of the misfortune was not made clear to me. When I lost my dear wife, I thought for a time that the trouble I was forewarned of had come; but my child grew up loving me, and happiness returned to my heart. I kept a close sharp watch for the shadow that was sure to descend upon me, and yet it took me unawares.

"The winters on this coast are terrible, and on wild nights I used to place a light in my observatory as an assistance to mariners. More than once I was thanked by sailors who had seen 'Collum's light' in time. Yet through this charity to others came my doom.

"One terrible night I became convinced that a ship was wrecking somewhere among these dangerous islands, and I got out my boat, and pushed my way to sea as well as I could, hoping to be the means of saving life. I heard cries, but could not reach the spot, nor discover the direction whence they came. I was driven on this island a little before dawn, and then the voices had ceased, and I felt that all was over without my having been able to afford any help.

"Pacing along the shore, my foot struck

against something unusual, and by the first glimmer of daybreak I perceived that it was a chest which had evidently been washed up from the wreck. Examining it carefully, I found that it was locked and sealed. 'Some valuable cargo, no doubt,' I thought, and wondered what I should do with it. As I bent over it I suddenly became aware that someone was near, and looking up, saw a young man standing beside me. I stared at him in amazement, for he was neither wet nor ill, nor did he bear any trace of having lately striven with death on the sea. He had a gentlemanly, thoughtful air, and returned my gaze with a half anxious, half confiding look.

"What can I do for you?" I asked, as soon as surprise would allow me to speak.

"Guard this," he said, pointing to what lay at our feet. "It is all I possess. Save it from my enemy. Keep it for me till I come for it."

"Where shall I put it?" I asked, and stooped to try if I could lift it.

"When I looked up again the young man had disappeared. A second ago my eyes had been fixed upon his; now I was alone. I gazed up and down the lonely shore, and climbed the rocks and called. Nothing human met my eyes. No one replied to me. Then I remembered something strange about the young man's manner—the sudden way he had come upon me, the unsuitableness of his dress, the impossibility of his having found his way to the island without a boat; and I knew that I had seen an apparition.

"The peculiar, anxious, confiding expression of his eyes remained upon my memory, and I vowed I would be true to his trust. I buried the chest where no man save myself can ever find it, and then I went to look for my boat.

"As I went I met with another startling object. Right across my path lay what seemed the corpse of a man, cold and blue—a drowned waif from the wreck. He bore no likeness to the young man who had so strangely appeared and disappeared, but was short and dark, with sallow skin and Egyptian features. Why did I touch him? But had I left him lying there, the stars had been untrue in their reckoning.

"I knelt beside him, restored him to life, and brought him home. Ora and I nursed him. He was ill some time, and I amused his sick-bed with stories of my

way of life, and told him many of the wonderful things the stars had revealed to me. He listened with great interest, and seemed grateful and friendly. I gave him all my confidence, and in an unlucky moment related to him the strange occurrence of my vision on the island, and of the burying of the coffer I had found. He told me he was the master of the merchant vessel that had been lost, and was concerned about all details of the wreck.

"As soon as he was able to move he asked me to accompany him to this island, that he might search for such scraps of his property as the winds and waves might cast upon its shore. He picked up several things which he claimed as his own; and after he had ceased to find anything from day to day, he still kept urging me to visit this place with him. I soon perceived that he was trying to discover whereabouts I had buried the coffer.

"Finding that I would not betray myself, he at last spoke to me plainly—told me that the coffer was his, that my pretence of having seen an apparition was a trick to deprive him of his property, and that he meant to have it, whether I would or not. Now I knew that the thing I had hidden was neither his nor mine, and so I resisted him.

"We were here, in this cave, where he had beguiled me on pretence of looking for waifs from the wreck. Suddenly he struck me on the head, and I fell senseless. When I recovered consciousness I was here as you see me, chained by the ankles in this miserable hole.

"My enemy then returned to my house, took advantage of a certain likeness to myself in his features to personate me, and established himself in my place. From time to time he visits me here, trying to persuade me to give up the coffer; but that I will never do till the owner comes for it."

Here the poor creature paused, and I said quickly:

"All this I fully understand. You have been treated most foully. But why, in Heaven's name, did you not suffer your daughter to make known your state. Why do you shrink from me and talk of death in the very moment when I have come to deliver you?"

Now up to this time the old man had told his story with the air of an intelligent person; but the moment I asked the latter

question a gleam of insanity seemed to dart across his brain.

"Why?" he asked excitedly. "Because my enemy is a wizard, a magician; he is in league with the Evil One, who holds me in his claw, ready to strike death into my veins the instant my case is made known to any creature. Have I not seen Satan in the long black hours pacing up and down yonder passage, and stopping to look in and gloat over his prey? But he could not touch me so long as we—as Ora and I kept the secret to ourselves. I would not speak, and I would not suffer her to betray me. And so I baffled them."

There was a ring of triumph in the poor old creature's voice as he said this, and he patted Ora's head almost gleefully, where she leaned with her face buried in his breast.

I said to myself that he was mad—driven quite mad by this solitary confinement, and his unhappy daughter had never discovered it.

"How could you believe," I said, "that your enemy had this supernatural power over your life?"

"How can I believe that the sun shines?" he asked gravely. "He comes here and sits beside me, and tells me of his dealings with Satan. He has lived, and will live, hundreds of years, though Lucifer, who does his will now, is bound to get him at last. You might not have believed him, but I knew better. The secrets of the stars had taught me many things."

"But tell me," I said: "if this terrible person has Satan for his servant, why does he not find him the coffer without your assistance?"

"It is a fault in the plan," answered the old man dreamily. "When Satan tried to see, he was baffled by an angel's wing. I cannot explain it to you, but I know it well enough myself."

"The angel was your daughter, then. Through her I have come here. Now listen to me, old man. Why were you not brave enough to die, and let your child go free?"

He hung his head on his breast, and fondled Ora's hair.

"You are right, sir," he said. "I will die, and she shall go free. Let the blow fall; it is due ere this."

"Then, if you are ready, I will strike off your chain, and let Satan do his worst."

Ora started up as I drew near, and seized my arm.

"Ora," I whispered, "poor child! do you not see that affliction has crazed your father's brain? Do not you also be mad, but let me deal with him."

I examined the chain, and found, as I expected, that it was eaten with rust. It was probably something belonging to the shipwrecked vessel which had come ashore. I laid a rusty link upon a large sharp stone, and lifting another stone, as heavy a one as I could raise, to a considerable height, let it fall upon the iron. As I raised my arms to do this, the lamplight fell full on my face, and I glanced at the poor old maniac, who, with folded arms, awaited his imaginary doom. In that instant, as the stone dropped, a terrible cry broke from his lips, and he fell back with a groan, just as his chain split asunder.

"He is dead. We have murdered him!" moaned Ora, falling on her knees beside him.

"No, he is not dead!" I exclaimed joyfully; for I had feared that the shock of expectation might have really deprived him of life. I poured brandy down his throat, and after a time he revived.

"The apparition," he muttered; "he has the face of the apparition. Ora, where is the young man who met me that morning on the shore?"

"He is wandering," I said to Ora. "Do not be afraid."

"I am not wandering," said the old man. "What I saw I saw. Reach me the lamp."

He raised the light to my face, and looked at me with a solemn, awful look.

"It was you who met me on the shore," he said; "you who gave the coffer in charge to me."

When the wretch whom I had known as "old Collum" saw us coming in our boat from the island, he escaped on the instant, and we saw him no more. The police made efforts to track him, but in vain.

I told you that there was a strange point about this story, and so, when the haze of folly and madness has been cleared away, there still remains something in it that is inexplicable. Urged by the poor old dotard whom I had rescued, I went with him to unearth the coffer which it had cost him so much to guard. It proved to be my own property, and

its contents restored to me the fortune I had lost.

Its loss in a ship that went down at sea had been the cause of the reverses which I mentioned in the beginning of my tale. A comparison of dates proved, if proof were necessary, that the vessel wrecked off the island was the same that had borne my heritage across the sea. The incident of the apparition I do not attempt to account for. That, on the morning after the wreck, I had spoken with him on the shore, and committed my property to his care, was firmly

believed by poor old Collum up to the moment of his death—a moment not far distant from that which saw his rescue from the cave.

Wrought upon so long by a knave on the one side, and a visionary and madman on the other, it was long ere Ora's tender imagination recovered from the morbid state into which it had been thrown by her terrible experiences. But time and change cleared away all clouds from her mind; while the energy and devotion that characterised the wild mountain girl remain to my beautiful wife.

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